

1. (currently amended) A method for communicating an audio message between a calling telephone apparatus and a called telephone apparatus while said called telephone apparatus remains in an on-hook state, said calling telephone apparatus and said called telephone apparatus being connected to a telephone system, said method comprising the step of:

introducing a digitized version of said audio message to said called telephone apparatus while a telephone line of said called telephone apparatus remains in said on-hook state.

2. (original) The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of:

introducing a signal identifying said calling party during a silent interval following a first ringing signal provided to said called telephone apparatus, whereby said called telephone apparatus is provided Caller ID information, in addition to said audio message.

3. (original) The method of claim 1 wherein:

said digitized version of said audio message is of sufficient duration to extend beyond a silent interval in which it begins.

4. (original) A method for communicating an audio message from a calling telephone apparatus to a called telephone apparatus while said called telephone apparatus remains in an on-hook state, said calling telephone apparatus and said called telephone apparatus being connected to a telephone system, said method comprising the steps of:

receiving a digitized version of said audio message during a silent interval following a ringing signal appearing at said called telephone apparatus;

converting said digitized version of said audio message to an acoustic version thereof; and

introducing said acoustic version to a speaker to produce an audible version of said audio message.

5. (original) The method of claim 4 further comprising the step of:

receiving a signal identifying said calling party during said silent interval following a first ringing signal appearing at said called telephone apparatus, whereby said called telephone apparatus is provided Caller ID information, in addition to said audio message.

6. (original) The method of claim 3 wherein:

said digitized version of said audio message is of sufficient duration to extend beyond said silent interval in which it begins.

7. (original) Apparatus for communicating an audio message between a calling telephone apparatus and a called telephone apparatus while said called telephone apparatus remains in an on-hook state, said calling telephone apparatus and said called telephone apparatus being connected to a telephone system, comprising:

a silence detector detecting a silent interval following a ringing signal provided to said called telephone apparatus; and

a signal injector, responsive to said silence detector, introducing a digitized version of said audio message to said called telephone apparatus during said detected silent interval.

8. (original) The apparatus of claim 7 further comprising:

a second signal injector introducing a signal identifying said calling party during said silent interval following a first ringing signal provided to said called telephone apparatus, whereby said called telephone apparatus is provided Caller ID information, in addition to said audio message.

9. (original) The apparatus of claim 7 wherein:

said signal injector introduces a digitized version of said audio message during an interval which begins during said silent interval and extends beyond it.

10. (original) Apparatus for communicating an audio message from a calling telephone apparatus to a called telephone apparatus while said called telephone apparatus remains in an on-hook state, said calling telephone apparatus and said called telephone apparatus being connected to a telephone system, comprising:

a silence detector detecting a silent interval following a second ringing signal provided to said called telephone apparatus;

a receiver, responsive to said silence detector, receiving a digitized version of said audio message at said called telephone apparatus during said detected silent interval; and.

a digital-to-analog converter converting said digitized version of said audio message to an audio version thereof; and

a speaker responsive to said audio version to produce an audible version of said audio message.

11. (original) The apparatus of claim 10 further comprising:

a second receiver responsive to said detection by said silence detector of said silent interval following a first ringing signal and, during said silent interval following said first ringing signal, receiving a signal identifying said calling party, whereby said called telephone apparatus is provided Caller ID information, in addition to said audio message.

12. (original) The apparatus of claim 10 wherein:

said receiver receives said digitized version of said audio signal during an interval which begins during said silent interval and extends beyond it.